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ABSTRACT

This paper examines racism and discrimination against rural blacks, especially as these factors relate to poverty caused by unemployment and underemployment. While overt racism in the rural South and Appalachia was sharply reduced during the 1970s, statistical evidence indicates that related differences, such as the black-white "income gap," were not greatly affected. Historical, cultural, and non-market factors can be conceptualized as racism and discrimination and seen as contributing to unemployment. Differences in income comes not by chance but from racism in the South and, more specifically, in Appalachia. Institutional discrimination by complete or partial restriction from job opportunities systematically keeps blacks in a low status and affirms continuing discriminatory images held by the larger Appalachian community. Different forms of institutional racism are described, notably the perception and separation of "black jobs" from higher-paying "white jobs." Census figures from 1983 indicated that hourly wages were lowest in the three regions of the South; in these regions of the country blacks were most heavily concentrated in low-income divisions. Although their educational backgrounds are similar to those of whites, black youth are excluded from some service-industry jobs. A study of hourly wages reported by a regional hotel and conference center shows that 70% of the black employees held the lowest-paid positions. The paper concludes by recommending more complete research, better training programs and employment standards among employers, and outreach programs that better define employer commitments to hiring and retaining blacks. (TES)

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Southern Appalachia and Southern Racism:

Employment Practice: A Case In Point

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SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN AND SOUTHERN RACISM:
EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES -- A CASE IN POINT

The general impression for the 90s is that racism in the south is on a decline. Few overt acts are being recorded or reported. Incidents in respect to conflicts between the races are minimal. Within most areas, blacks exercise an increasing amount of opportunity and access to the larger society. Whereas there still remain clear divisions in interpersonal and social interactions, blacks are not generally being subjugated to or intimidated by racist acts or attacks. Even the Klan has sugar-coated its racist nature under the banner of anti-abortion, white supremacy, prayer in schools, etc. as reflected in recent marches in Guilford County, NC.

Perhaps the major struggle for blacks in the 90s is racism that surfaces within institutional discrimination. Institutional discrimination is defined as an intentional or unintentional act resulting from prejudice or racism committed by majority members of a societal unit or organization toward a minority group or individual causing negative consequences.

Institutional discrimination remains as a barrier within the social structure, educational opportunities, financial sectors, religious divisions, employment practices, and other levels within society. The subtle nature of institutional discrimination has a calming effect that gives or creates the appearance that racism is not present. Only when one goes beyond the surface can racism be identified in the institutional practices that result in discrimination. Trying to make sense of the very dynamic process that unfolds is made more complicated because of the different spheres and forms that cannot be fully explained or clearly differentiated. Kuvlesky, et al (1972) raised a number of concerns:

> . . . the extent to which socioeconomic problems affecting rural blacks are institutional rather than individual is another area in which knowledge is lacking. It is unclear how the "Black experience," historically characterized by relative deprivation and inequality in rural society, is linked to the current social status of rural Blacks. We also lack knowledge about the extent to which the relationship between racial "status" and social class of rural blacks is influenced by institutional discrimination, prejudice, inequality, and ethnic or cultural patterns unique to rural society.[1]

Their report identifies five (5) major causes of problems for rural American blacks. This paper examines two of the causes -- racism and discrimination -- as it relates to the larger condition of poverty through the effects of unemployment and underemployment.[2] The concern goes beyond the theory which posits an inverse relationship between racial wage differentials and relative black unemployment and underemployment. The theory may be valid but it does not deal with market discrimination or racial differences in work behavior, inter-market movement, and non-market activity.[3]

An underlying assumption of superiority prevails in rural Appalachia which undercuts the social and political order of the region. The assumption as it is played out in the work place makes opportunities in terms of jobs and wages more readily accorded to whites as their "just due," whereas they are frequently withheld from non-whites.[4]

While overt racism has been sharply reduced, differences which result from it, such as the "income gap," have not been greatly affected.[5] The existence of racial wage differentials is itself a complex matter. The available evidence seems to conclude that black unemployment and underemployment come not so much from the factors of joblessness or lower wages as from a number of other factors which manages to maintain black productivity at a low level. Historical, cultural and non-market related factors are seen as contributing to unemployment and underemployment.[6] These

factors can be conceptualized under racism and discrimination which differ from their overt forms.

Employment and Income

In the South, employment is the simplest overall measure of status differences between the races. Employment translates into income. The more income one has affords one to more fully participate or to choose not to participate in the benefits found within the social structure. This ability is linked to one's status or more specifically stated life chances.

Life chances of both races in the south, as reflected in income, falls short of the rest of the nation. Smith and Welch, 1986, statistically calculated the wage differences for white and black males by adult age groups in terms of percent of wages in the north (Table 1) and in terms of differences between southern white and black males (Table 2).* White and black wages during the period between 1940 to 1980 made gains on their respective counter parts in the north. The important point here is that both groups have fewer life chances as expressed in income than their northern brothers. For blacks the life chances are more restricted. This is more evident when blacks' income is compared to whites' income during this period. The 11.4% gain in the 40 years is impressive, yet blacks still lag behind whites. The next generation in theory will benefit from their parents' income gains, whereas their parents' achievements have been a struggle rather than the exercising of their life chances.

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* NOTE: The author calculated the mean of the different age groups to construct both tables.

TABLE 1: Wage Differential for Southern White and Black Males from 1940 to 1980 Expressed in % of Northern Wages[7]

YEAR	BLACK/WHITE	WHITE	BLACK	DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BLACK/WHITE
1940	77.7	91.2	70.9	20.3
1950	78.8	87.7	69.1	18.6
1960	76.4	88.8	67.8	21.0
1970	79.5	91.2	72.5	18.7
1980	90.3	93.5	84.6	8.9
MEAN		90.5	73.0	17.5

TABLE 2: Wage Difference Between Southern White/Black Males from 1940 to 1980 Expressed in % of White Wages[8]

YEAR	% OF WHITE
1940	80.2
1950	81.3
1960	79.1
1970	81.2
1980	90.9

Tables 1 and 2 reflect the large gains blacks made during the 70s. The decades preceding the 70s were mixed with no clear trend. The movement of industries to the sunbelt and the utilization and enforcement of affirmative action programs paid off for blacks during the 70s.

For the Region the gap is greater than the South. Table 3 using all income for the Region remained constant between 80.3 and 84.9 of the nation's per capita income. Projecting from the lag of blacks in the south, blacks in the Region are deeper into the levels of poverty.

TABLE 3: Per Capita Money Income Appalachia and United States 1969-79[9]

	Per Capita Money Income in Dollars		Percentage of U. S. Income	
	1969	1979	1969	1979
Appalachian Alabama	$2,430	$6,147	77.9%	83.9%
Appalachian Georgia	2,419	6,301	77.6	86.0
Appalachian Kentucky	1,732	4,856	55.5	66.2
Appalachian Maryland	2,599	6,327	83.3	86.3
Appalachian Mississippi	1,861	4,956	59.7	67.6
Appalachian New York	2,845	6,135	91.2	83.7
Appalachian North Carolina	2,437	6,095	78.1	83.2
Appalachian Ohio	2,443	6,073	78.3	82.9
Appalachian Pennsylvania	2,790	6,770	89.5	92.4
Appalachian South Carolina	2,571	6,473	82.4	88.3
Appalachian Tennessee	2,340	5,983	75.0	81.6
Appalachian Virginia	2,050	5,614	65.7	76.6
West Virginia (whole state)	2,333	6,179	74.8	84.3
Appalachian Region	2,505	6,221	80.3	84.9
United States	3,119	7,330	100	100

In summary the level of income is directly related to status. Blacks in the south have less life chances in respect to income resulting from employment. The thesis of the remaining paper is that the difference in income is not by chance, but comes into being from racism in the south and Appalachia specifically. Institutional discrimination systematically holds blacks into a low status with fewer life chances. It serves as a self fulfilling prophecy. The failure of employment opportunities affect the psychological and cultural determinants of black Appalachians' ability or willingness to participate in the social structure. Simply stated a message is given to the black community: **"DO NOT BOTHER TO APPLY FOR SOME JOBS."** The only jobs open are black jobs. Each black person seeking employment has two choices: (1) yield to inferior status, or (2) not yield. Sometimes this may mean seeking greener pastures elsewhere, but often it results in negative life

chances or dependence on society through social programs or the criminal justice system. This drama is continuously being played out within black families. It is at the core of family breakup, tension, and well being.

Perhaps greater than the internal issues for the black community is what it becomes in the larger Appalachian community: an affirmation. These affirmations are stated as "We cannot find any;" "They do not want to work;" "They cannot handle the job." etc.*

> ...because blacks are over-represented in lower-ranked occupations. Whites' image of the black population is derived from the black population's over-representation in the less skilled, lower-ranked occupations, which has been a result of systemic discrimination by all segments of the white population.[10]

Forms of Institutional Discrimination

Wachtel's 1965 literature review identified three major methods of discrimination in employment. Each method had sub-categories. Institutional discrimination in Appalachia is linked to two of the methods:

1. Complete exclusion from employment regardless of qualification and previous experience.
   (a) Outright refusal to hire.
   (b) Recruiting workers through associations and agencies with membership limited to whites**
2. Partial restriction on employment opportunities.
   (a) Limitation of employment to menial and unskilled jobs or to those involving little public contact.
   (b) Demotion from mechanical to menial jobs.[11]

Wachtel gives the following as reasons for the unequal employment opportunities. It may be that Appalachian employers have always hired whites for some jobs and blacks for others. From the employer's point, it appears to

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* For the Region this is played out through the informal white network that keeps members informed about job possibilities. Unfortunately blacks are not members of the network. This is probably not from malice, but the reality that very few biracial informal networks are in the mountains.

have worked, thus they see no reason to change; an employer as a victim of his/her environment is a prejudiced individual, thus will not hire blacks in any other position; the employer may wish to use discrimination to divert hostility which might otherwise be directed at the company. This was evident in the coal strikes when blacks were brought in to replace white workers; or it could be that the employer is playing a role, acting as he/she thinks he/she is expected to act in his/her position; it could also be fear of possible trouble or dissatisfaction from customers or antagonism in the community; still another is that the employer believes blacks will be unable to do the job or will seek special privileges; and finally, if the firm or division is small, the employees will be able to put personal pressure on the employer not to hire blacks.[12]

Reasons are real, but the outcome of a decision to hire blacks only in certain positions is institutional racism. Rungeling's analysis of rural labor market behavior revealed indirect evidence of racial and sexual discrimination. His findings describe labor force decisions in regard to blacks, female heads of household, and married females as occupational segregation. Both sex and race in his work are related to lower earnings and income of black families and of households headed by females.[13]

Boston (1988) discusses three related forms of labor market discrimination. His discussion supports the above conclusions. In the first form, discrimination is present or evident when two individuals or groups differ racially, but possess identical job related characteristics. Everything else remaining constant, one group receives a smaller remuneration for its efforts than the other. The criterion for the difference in wages is race.

> . . . The second type has to do with differential and unequal access to employment. In this case Group B possesses similar attributes to A but is more likely to be unemployed simply because of its race; other things are again held constant. Finally discrimination exists if the job offers made to A are superior to those of B, and in addition the former experiences greater on-the-job mobility because of race.[14]

It is the second and third forms "...which are the most prevalent and historically significant forms of discrimination against blacks."[15] Federal laws seem to have made it difficult in the 90s, at least at the time of hiring, to pay different wages. In Appalachia, the above described forms of labor market discrimination are played out in terms of blacks not being found in certain jobs and over represented in others. The jobs with the lowest salaries and status are for blacks. These jobs are usually flat in terms of potential for promotion or advancement opportunities (which translates into higher income and life chances). On the other hand, white jobs have levels, thus a better chance for higher incomes. For example in housekeeping, where does one go up; there are fewer classifications and fewer supervisory positions which tends to be the next level, but are held for whites. On the other hand, there are groundskeeper one, groundskeeper two and so on.

Each section of the Region has its own distribution of white jobs and black jobs. So, in another section, the above may be reversed, with levels for housekeeping and flat for groundskeeper with the former paying more. What makes Appalachia, especially in the non-urban areas unique from the south, is the fewer number of blacks. Institutional racism can be masked by whites holding, or are in the majority of, positions that are in traditionally earmarked black jobs. This outcome results because of the fewer number of blacks in the Region. When nearly all blacks are found in a job division even though the majority for the division are white, that division becomes a black

job. The large number of whites in the division results because there are not enough blacks in the Region.

One of the strongest indicators for the two types of jobs is the difference in hourly wages. In general hourly wages require minimum education. Using the U.S. Bureau of the Census "Current Population Survey" (CPS) microdata tapes for the month of January 1983, Boston's findings illustrate the point. He found that hourly wages are lowest in the three southern regions (South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central) and in the three regions blacks were most heavily concentrated in low income divisions. In three of the remaining six regions (East North Central, Mountain, and Pacific) the average hourly wages for blacks exceed those of whites, even though the annual earnings of blacks do not exceed those of whites in any region.***

Turning back to black jobs versus white jobs, an example will be given. The requirement for a cashier at a supermarket, fast food restaurant or department store is minimally a high school education. Since the 70s, blacks and whites have attended the same schools. Many of these jobs are held by high school students with little or no past experience. Seldom are black students in these positions. Often the case for blacks is they are cleaning up spills in the supermarket, cooking or cleaning in the fast food restaurant, and are not to be found in the department store.

The Practice of Institutional Discrimination

An examination of employment data supports the thesis that black income as determined by bottom level jobs is a means for locking black Appalachians

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*** This apparent contradiction addresses problems associated outside of the south which shows up in who gets overtime and bonuses.

into a lower status within the larger social structure. The Office for Civil Rights Annual Report from 1977-1988 from a large employer within the 396 counties that define Appalachia will be used. The employer is a major hotel, conference and retreat center. Overall, there are two occupational groups: hourly wages (minimum education requirements, labor intensive jobs) and professionals (higher educational requirements, more specialized functions). Only hourly wage positions are used in the remaining discussion.

Table 4 lists the 237 hourly waged positions at the center in 1987. Twenty of the hourly waged positions are held by black workers accounting for 8.4% of the work force. Blacks are found in the lowest paid positions: food service assistant and housekeeping assistant. The lowest salary grade at the center is 50 and the highest is 71. The hiring rate for pay grade 50 is $10,880.00 in 1990. For the position of Cook I, pay grade 52, the current hiring salary is $11,760.00; General Utility Worker, pay grade 53 is $12,194.00; Clerk Typist II, pay grade 54, is $12,674.00; Waste Water Plant Operator, pay grade 60, is $16,114.00; Police Officer II, pay grade 64, is $18,994.00; and Food Service Director I, pay grade 67, is $21,566.00.

Seventy percent (14 of the 20) of the blacks are found in salary grade 50. Of the 214 positions held by whites, 70 (33%) were in pay grade 50. Only 3 (15%) black positions were <u>above</u> pay grade 60 while whites held 52 (22%) in the same category. This clearly illustrates institutional discrimination wherein blacks are systematically held in certain positions. The old argument that "there are relatively few qualified blacks in the area" or that we cannot attract blacks to the area has no logical basis.

TABLE 4: ALL HOURLY WAGED POSITIONS BY RACE/SEX IN 1987

		WHITE	BLACK	NA	ASIAN	MALE	FEMALE
--	Duplicating Unit.Supv.II		1				1
--	Truck Driver	1				1	
--	Unk. Craftsman	1				1	
--	UNKN	4				4	
50	Food Service Asst. I	37	6		1	16	28
50	Housekeeping Asst.	31	8			21	18
50	Sales Clerk I	2					2
51	Commercial Cashier I	1					1
52	Baker I	1					1
52	Cook I	6	1	1		4	4
52	Food Service Asst. II	6				5	1
52	Housework	1					1
53	Floor Maint. Asst.	7				7	
53	General Utility Worker	12	1			13	
54	Clerk Typist II		1				1
54	Housekeeping Supv. I	4				3	1
55	Baker II			1		1	
55	Cook III	2				1	1
55	Security Guard	1				1	
55	Stock Clerk II	3				3	
56	Grounds Worker	6				5	1
56	Mail Clerk II	1				1	
57	Clerk Typist III	6					6
57	Cook Supervisor I	1					1
57	Head Baker	1					1
57	Mach. Operator III	1				1	
58	Housekeeping Supv. II	2				2	
58	Labor Crew Leader	2				2	
58	Maint.Mechanic I						
59	Boiler Operator II	5				5	
59	Electrician I	1				1	
59	Print. Pho. Typeset.	1				1	
59	Records Clerk IV	1					1
59	Secretary IV	2					2
60	Maint. Mechanic II	8				8	
60	W/W Wa PLTOP	2	1			3	
61	Painter	4				4	
61	Sales Manager III	1					1
61	Warehouse Mgr. I	1				1	
62	Food Service Supv. III	3				2	1
62	Grounds Wk.Supv. I	1				1	
62	Locksmith II	1				1	
62	Maint. Mechanic III	3				3	
63	Mechanic II	2				2	
63	Boiler Operator I	5				5	
63	Carpenter Supv. I	1				1	
63	Const/Renovat. Tech. II	1				1	
63	Electrician II	2				2	
63	Painter Supv.	1				1	
63	Plumber II	5				5	
63	Police Officer I	7				6	1
63	Steam Plant Supv. I	1				1	
63	Welder II	1				1	
64	Police Officer II		1			1	
65	HVAC Mech.	3				3	
65	Mechanic Supv. I						
66	Electrician Supervisor I		1				1
66	Police Officer III	3				3	
66	W/W Water Plant Chief I	1				1	
67	Food Service Director I		1				1
67	HVAC Tech.	1				1	
68	Electrician Supv. II	1				1	
68	Plant Maint. Supv. I	1				1	
68	Police Chief	1				1	
71	Plant Maint. Supv. II	1				1	
TOTAL #		214	20	2	1		
		237 for all					

Table 5 illustrates the positions blacks have held in the past 13 years. Black workers have historically been employed primarily in the two lowest positions. Both tables illustrate institutional racism at the center.

TABLE 5: Position Categories for Blacks from 1977 to 1989

*	YEAR	1989	1988	1987	1986	1985	1984	1983	1982	1981	1980	1979	1978	1977
00	Truck Driver	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	--	--	--	--
50	Food Serv.Asst. I	6	5	6	8	5	7	7	8	7	6	6	6	7
50	Housekeeping Asst.	23	13	8	9	9	9	9	8	11	17	26	25	24
52	Baker I	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	1	1
52	Cook I	1	--	1	1	3	1	1	--	--	2	4	3	3
53	Gen. Utility Worker	1	--	1	--	--	--	--	1	1	1	1	1	--
54	Clerk Typist II	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	1	--	--
54	Housekeeping Supv. I	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	2	2	2
55	Cook II	--	--	--	1	--	--	2	2	3	4	3	4	4
57	Cook Supervisor I	--	--	--	--	--	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	--
60	Water/Waste WTR PLTOP	--	--	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
62	Food Serv. Supv. III	--	--	--	1	1	1	1	--	--	--	--	--	--
64	Police II	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
66	Police III	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	1	--
67	Food Service Dir.	--	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
TOTAL BLACK		32	19	20	22	20	21	23	22	25	34	47	44	43
YEARLY TOTAL			234	237	203	181	204	192	192	207	228	216	205	191

* Salary Classification 50 is the first grade in the salary classification.

In conclusion, rather than rehash the major point of the thesis that black income as determined by bottom level jobs as a means for locking blacks into a lower status within the larger social structure, where do we go from here is presented. Certainly the starting point is to recognize the existence of the thesis by verifying it with the employment sector of one's area. Recognition should be the start of undoing the practice. The next steps could be: (1) Examine the potential for currently employed blacks to be promoted to other units in which blacks have never been hired; and (2) Develop a mandatory sensitivity training program for all employees who make hiring decisions; (3) Include in the performances standards for supervisors the hiring and retention of black workers; and (4) Create an outreach program for the white and black communities that seeks to clarify and redefine the employer's commitment to hiring blacks in an open market.

One final note, hiring a single black in a traditional segregated unit is doomed for failure and reinforces the reasons for maintaining the white

only unit. The informal pressures by white employees on a single black (racial slurs, harassment, unfair assignment of tasks, etc.) requires an exceptionally strong individual. About 15 years ago, a black was hired at the above conference center to a traditional all white unit. With no support from the supervisor, the black worker was open game for the white workers. In time the black worker's work performance dropped and he began to come to work late or missed days. After many opportunities for him to change his behavior, the supervisor had no choice but to terminate the worker.

END NOTES

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